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A NATIONAL CONTRIBUTION

BY EDITH WYATT

ON a wet, December evening, after everybody else had gone to bed, I once picked up a book and began to read. The whole house was still. I was dissatisfied with my thoughts not only on myself, but “on man, on nature, and on human life”—too dissatisfied either to face the difficulties that distressed me or to dismiss them.

I read for two hours a familiar novel of Mr. William Dean Howells, *The Son of Royal Langbrith*. This is the page at which I began.

“—the doctor asked, ‘What do you think of the man who takes the life of another’s soul—destroys his soul? It was a woman’s expression.’ The judge smiled intelligently. ‘I should imagine. But I should doubt whether it could be done. Do you want to engage me for the defense?’”

For the rest of the two hours I lived the days of Dr. Anther in the town of Saxmills. I lived the tissue of the existence of Hawberk, the opium victim whose soul was being destroyed, and of his daughter who comforted his nightmares, and of the men and women there whose fates were still affected by the evil exploitations of Royal Langbrith, now long dead. As Hawberk I struggled gradually to recovery. I sat with Dr. Anther in his office and talked to him of Langbrith, my dead enemy.

“I’ve seen the time when I wanted to go into the cemetery and dig him up and burn him, but I don’t know as I do now. What do you say, Doct’ Anther? Let bygones be bygones, as the fellow said about his old debts when he started in to make new ones? Still it does gravel me—”

Our library lamp had begun to go out. I was myself again. As it winked and gulped and I blew it out to darkness, I could see that up-stairs they had thoughtfully left the hall gas burning for me; and that, since it was late, and they would probably wake up when I put it out, I ought to go to

bed. I went, filled with the thought of the wonder of the actual world and the adventures of its myriad souls, souls so magnificent, so funny, so tragic, so miraculous, each in his own way on his journey unlike that of any other soul.

I had known before that "life like a dome of many-colored glass stains the white radiance of eternity." But I had forgotten it, until the repose and charm of a work of art revealed the truth to me. Now that the multitudinous, differentiations of life had been suggested to me, I was able to look as through a crystal at my difficulties. Whatever they had been, I could have looked at them with a clearer mind, and as after a clarifying recreation.

It is for this I read fiction—for its imaginative realization of life, for its creative power. A book is no better to me than a dungeon, a party telephone, or any other formal accepted method of preventing genuine, human intercourse, unless I can live freely in its pages, unless I can emerge from the convincing truth of its world, back into my own ways, as from some sparkling sea-change into something rich and strange.

I turn to fiction to be metamorphosed, and literally for my re-creation. Of course I know there are other ways of reading novels.

"Who shall meet them at these altars—who shall light them to that shrine?

Velvet-footed who shall guide them to the goal?

Unto each his voice and vision, unto each his spoor and sign"—

People read novels as differently as they dance and dress and eat. Many, far from liking a thorough metamorphosis, feel a species of alarm before a work of fiction unless it has the quality of unreality. These readers prefer in a novel some rather violent presentment of which they are to be reassured as to its illusory character. They are with superficial, but without essential, difference the immemorial audience of Shakespeare's humorous outline, who must be continually told that the stage-lion is really Snug the joiner, and that the composition truly is child's play.

Others enjoy in the art of fiction only the reproduction of certain conventional literary effects. Their pleasure in reading is not in walking into the picture, but in looking to see whether it repeats some pattern they had delighted in before.

I love to walk into the picture. I love to read "dreaming true." I love to read myself awake in fresh fields and pastures new and to walk through them, letting down the bars

on one unknown incarnation of existence after another. I wish a novel to maintain the old connotation of its name, and far from painting again a conventional and twice-told or hundred-times-told composition to give me a *Weltanschauung* which is new. I ask of a novelist not that he should convince me of the un-life-likeness of his fable, nor that he should repeat a pattern in writing, but that he should add an authoritative and original design, should evoke for the world his own peculiar and fresh impression of life—that he should contribute.

The genius of Mr. Howells contributes a great gallery of these impressions, an exhibition of social story heretofore untold, of country and city scenes, of human souls and characters in a variety and scope, which makes them, for readers who have the passion for dreaming true, a constant admiration, a beloved enjoyment, and what can only be described as a solid satisfaction.

Mark Twain says of him:

"For forty years his English has been to me a continual delight and astonishment. In the sustained exhibition of certain qualities—clearness, compression, verbal exactness, and unforced and seemingly unconscious felicity of phrasing—he is, in my belief, without his peer in the English-writing world. *Sustained*—I entrench myself behind that protecting word. There are others who exhibit these great qualities as greatly as does he, but only by intervalled distributions of rich moonlight with stretches of veiled and dimmer landscape between: whereas Howells's moon sails cloudless skies all night, and all the nights."

In the same essay Mark Twain describes one of Mr. Howells's felicitous methods of realizing a human scene to his reader so aptly that quotation from his appreciation is imperative:

"There is another thing which is contentingly noticeable in Mr. Howells's books. That is to say his 'stage directions.' . . . Some authors overdo the stage directions. . . . Other authors . . . have nothing in stock but a cigar, a laugh, a blush, and a bursting into tears. . . . They say:

"'. . . replied Alfred, flipping the ash from his cigar.' (This explains nothing; it only wastes space.)

"'. . . responded Richard with a laugh.' (There is nothing to laugh at, there never is. The writer puts it in from force of habit—automatically; he is paying no attention to his work or he would see there is nothing to laugh at.)

"'. . . murmured Gladys, blushing.' (This poor old shop-worn blush is a tiresome thing. We get so we would rather Gladys would fall out of the book and break her neck than do it again. . . . In a little while we hate her, just as we do Richard. . . . But I am friendly to Mr. Howells's

stage directions; more friendly than any one else, I think. They are done with a competent and discriminating art, and are faithful to the requirements of a stage direction's proper and lawful office, which is to inform. Sometimes they convey a scene and its conditions so well that I believe I could see the scene and get the spirit and meaning of the accompanying dialogue if some one would read merely the stage directions to me and leave out the talk. For instance, a scene like this, from *The Undiscovered Country*.

"'. . . And she laid her arms with a beseeching gesture on her father's shoulder.'

"'. . . she answered, following his gesture with a glance.'

"'. . . she said, laughing nervously.'

"'. . . she asked, turning swiftly upon him that strange, searching glance.'

"'. . . she reluctantly admitted.'

"'. . . but her voice died wearily away, and she stood looking into his face with puzzled entreaty.'

"Mr. Howells does not repeat his forms, and does not need to; he can invent fresh ones without limit."

Innumerable authors can call spirits from the vasty deep of American life without ever making them come. Doubtless it is because he uses the right words to bring them that they answer Mr. Howells's summons, in such numbers and variety. Judges and traveling-men and lawyers and doctors and dressmakers and spiritualists and society leaders and farmers and cabin-boys and playwrights and inventors and agitators and convicts and clubmen and millionaires and boarding-house keepers and journalists and Shakeresses—men and women and children of all sorts and conditions.

They rise before you with the delicacy and right individuality of human friends. The society women are not social strugglers bound up in the possession of their poodles and tiaras, but the sensible and distinguished Mrs. Bowen of the Italian-American consular circles and the humorous limited and graceful Nannie Corey of Boston. The dressmakers can speak in natural accents and without pins in their mouths; and you can like them and love them and look forward with delight to spending the afternoon with them. The former old farmer, Deacon Latham, talks to you, not of crops, but of whether his granddaughter is going to be homesick with her aunt in Venice. The clubmen are visible at instants when they are not tipping the waiter. You know one of them, Mr. Otis Binning, for instance, an elderly bachelor, far better than as though you had seen him hailing cabs and tipping waiters interminably, by one paragraph of a letter of

his, written to a relative in Boston after he has been in New York two months:

"The literary superstition concerning us elderly fellows is (or used to be in the good, old Thackeray times) that we are always thinking of our first loves, and are going about rather droopingly on account of them. My own experience is that we are doing nothing of the kind. We are the only cheerful people in the world, and so long as we keep single we are impartially impassioned of almost every interesting type of woman we meet. I find the greatest pleasure in bestowing my affections right and left, and I enjoy a delightful surprise in finding them hold out in spite of my lavish use of them. If I totted up the number of my loves, young and old, since I came here early in December, Leperello's list would be nothing to it."

Mr. Howells's millionaires and agitators are men besides being millionaires and agitators. The vivid and moving tale of Dryfoos, the speculator and owner of the land where natural gas-wells are discovered; the portrait of Silas Lapham against the riches of his mineral-paint industry are of the profoundest force and wisdom of Mr. Howells's art. They are absolute. Of the same quality is the tragic figure of Lindau—the veteran German-American Socialist and translator, who has lost his hand in the Civil War. Here is this "agitator" as Basil March, now his editor, sees him in paying a visit to his old and beloved teacher in a New York tenement:

"March pushed the door open into a room like that on the left, but with a writing-desk instead of a cobbler's bench, and a bed, where Lindau sat propped up, with a coat over his shoulders and a skull-cap on his head, reading a book, from which he lifted his eyes to stare blankly over his spectacles at March. His hairy old breast showed through the night-shirt, which gaped apart; the stump of his left arm lay upon the book to keep it open.

"'Ah, my tear y'ong friendt! Passil! Marge! Iss it you?' he called out, joyously, the next moment.

"'Why, are you sick, Lindau?' March anxiously scanned his face, in taking his hand.

"'. . . No. I'm all righdt.' . . .

"As if he saw some appeal for greater frankness in March's eye, he went on. 'I tidn't come here begause I was too boor to lif anywhere else, and I ton't stay in pedt begause I couldn't haf a fire to keep warm if I wanted it. I'm nodd zo badt off as Marmontel when he went to Paris. I'm a liddle loaxurious, that is all. If I stay in pedt it's zo I can fling money away on somethings else. Heigh?

"'But what *are* you living here for, Lindau?' March smiled at the irony lurking in Lindau's words.

"'Well, you zee, I foundt I was begoming a liddle too moch of an aristocrat. I hadt a room oap in Greenvidge Willage among dose pig

pugs over on the West Side, and I foundt'—Lindau's voice lost its jesting quality, and his face darkened—'that I was beginning to forget the boer!'

"'I should have thought,' said March, with impartial interest, 'that you might have seen poverty enough now and then in Greenwich Village to remind you of its existence.'

"'Nodt like here,' said Lindau. 'Andt you must zee it all the dtime—zee it, hear it, smell it, dtaste it—or you forget it. That is what I gome here for. I was begoming a ploated aristograt. I thought I was nodt like these beple down here, when I gome down once to look aroundt; I thought I must be somethings else, and zo I zaid I better take myself in time, and I gome here among my brothers—the beccars and the thieves!' A noise made itself heard in the next room, as if the door were furtively opened, and a faint sound of tiptoeing, and of hands clawing on a table. 'Thiefs!' Lindau repeated, with a shout. 'Lidtle thieves that gabture your breakfast. Ah! Ha! Ha!' A wild scurrying of feet, joyous cries and tittering and a slamming door followed upon his explosion, and he resumed in the silence: 'Idt is the children cot pack from school. They gome out and steal what I leaf there on my duple. Idt's one of our lidtle chokes; we understand each other.'"

Among all his portraits none are more arresting than Mr. Howells's presentations of speculative American natures—Dr. Boynton, Fulkerson, Colville, Mr. Waters, Wanhope, Hewson, March—perhaps there is a touch of the love of speculation in all his American men. Indeed, it sometimes seems as though the passion for speculation, whether exemplified by men shouting in the pit, in the Board of Trade, or by the tendency to say "I guess," or by William James's "Will to Believe," or San Francisco's generous determination to give Ruef a chance in civic life after his prison term, were characteristic of almost all kinds of American men—their most deep-seated, national characteristic, and producing at once their meanest acts and their greatest. The trait is wonderfully revealed in *The Quality of Mercy*, *The Son of Royal Langbrith*, *The Undiscovered Country*, *A Hazard of New Fortunes*. Sometimes it is indicated with the perfection of irony.

"'It may be,' said Mr. Waters, with a carefulness to do justice to assassination which made Colville smile, 'that the modern scientific spirit may be able to evolve something useful from the principle (of assassination), but considering the enormous abuses and perversions to which it is liable, I am very doubtful of it—very doubtful.'

"'. . . Don't you think the modern scientific spirit could evolve something useful out of the old classic idea of suicide?'"

"'Perhaps,' said Mr. Waters. 'I haven't yet thought it over. The worst thing about suicide—and this must always rank it below political assassination—is that its interest is purely personal.'"

Sometimes the passion for speculation is conveyed with an ineffable emotion and beauty that lie too deep for tears, as in the death of Dr. Boynton.

Again, the charm of a fancied plan for the sake of the glamour of chance is perfectly evoked, as it shines in a boy's heart, in *The Flight of Pony Baker*—told with a warmth, a funniness, a justice to the soul of a child, which make you feel that every boy on earth needs to be understood as delicately as Howells understands Pony Baker, and ought to be as responsibly cherished.

In general I believe that cosmopolitanism and international understanding are better served by the novelist who discovers to the world the natures of his own countrymen as they develop in their own land, than by the novelist who contributes his guess about the inhabitants of other countries. Of course, Mr. Henry James, distinguished genius in surmise, his reverence and absoluteness in "making out" the texture of the spirits of the men and women of other countries, as well as of his own, are a complete exception. His endowment and career in this kind are not only supreme and peerless; I think they are unique. Thackeray's Florac and Mr. Howells's Lindau and his wonderful delineation of an Austrian officer in *A Fearful Responsibility*, Mr. Galsworthy's Louis Ferrand, and Arnold Bennett's French aeronaut in *The Old Wives' Tale*, all seem compact of essential truth. One can call to mind many a solitary and occasional figure and even group, in literature, created and presented with verity by a novelist of an alien nation. But in general I believe the great and authoritative tale a writer has to tell the world will be the tale of life in his own land. Whatever else he may say, Daudet tells the tale of the boastful, the fatuous and irresistible Midi unless he tells the tale of the worldly sparkle and the worldly tragedy of Paris. Whatever else he may say, Turgénief tells the tale of the brooding sadness and oppression of liberty-loving Russia. Whatever else he may say, Howells tells the tale of the speculative soul of America. The "French" novels, the "Russian" novels, the "American" novels of these writers are not "views" of these countries caught through the fancy nor upon a railroad journey, nor assembled from popular reports; they are knowledge of these nations learned through the penetration and imaginings of enriching years of life.

I believe there is no way in which a novel *has* to be made.

Or, if there is, it certainly should be opposed for its arbitrariness, in the interest of truth. But the novel in whose pages I dream true most fully is generally made, or rather grows, from the natural actions of its men and women, instead of having its movement worked from outside, as it were, by the determination and ingenuity of the author. I know that in the English of "criticism," or maybe it is the English of advertising, the words "novel of action" are ordinarily used to mean "novel of mechanism"; and that a gay book where the characters are manipulated smartly from spot to spot to suit a skilful plan of the author, as in a marionette theater or a game of chess, is called a "novel of action"; and a novel like *The Old Wives' Tale* or *Fathers and Sons* or *The Quality of Mercy*, where the men and women are not pawns or marionettes, but figures of flesh and blood, and are not mechanically manipulated, but act, is never called a "novel of action." So that when one employs the word "action" to indicate in fiction anything else but sword-play, one must qualify the term. I admire Mr. Howells's books because they are made of the *natural* actions of men and women, succeeding and struggling and failing and cheating and hating and loving and parting and marrying and dying. I admire a story of the burning hopes and desires of idealistic youth, like *The Apprenticeship of Lemuel Barker*; and the absurd and tragic episode of his arrest and his night and day in the police-station are among the most dramatic situations I have ever seen in any novel. I admire a story of the misunderstanding of different generations; and the scene where Dryfoos stands by his son's coffin in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* is one of the most intense scenes I have ever lived in on a printed page. I admire a story of passion and jealousy and infidelity like *A Modern Instance*; and a story of crime and of human forgiveness and the punishments of the heart and of the law like *The Quality of Mercy*; and a story of the freshest romance of love, like *The Lady of the Aroostook*. All the score and more of Mr. Howells's novels present the movement of human nature with the arresting and convincing clearness of realization, with abiding fictive power.

Whatever scene or situation Mr. Howells imprints has always the air of being an integral part of the whole wide world. You are not oppressed as you sometimes are in the presence of some other scenes and situations in literature—

by a starved sense of the violent fictive isolation of some "set" of people, who seem to be cut off from all healthful nourishment from the common springs of the various, actual life of the globe.

These social scenes and situations are as various and heretofore untold as Mr. Howells's characters—the public masked ball Mrs. Bowen, Imogen, and Colville attend in Florence; the shooting of Conrad Dryfoos in the car riot; the dedication of the library at Saxmills to the hypocritical exploiter of his townsmen, by his victims; Marcia Hubbard's meeting on the Boston afternoon street, with the girl her husband has wronged; the snow battle in *Fennel and Rue*—many other aspects and deeds of life, newly observed and lucidly revealed.

Among all these scenes I chance to like best those that breathe the charm and scent of tangled, outdoor places. That ragged, sharp-branched look of the roads and woods, even of settled country, in America, that look which is somehow of the very essence of a rough sweetness and homeliness, gives me an indescribable and peculiar delight such as one finds in a change of weather or the honk of a wild duck.

"At the verge of a westward-sloping valley was a stretch of many hundred acres, swept by a forest fire a few years before, and now rank with the vegetation which the havoc had enriched. Blueberries and huckleberries, raspberries and blackberries, battened upon the ashes of the pine and oak and chestnut, and flourished round the charred stumps; the strawberry matted the blackened ground and ran to the border of the woods, where, among the thin grass, it lifted its fruit on taller stems, and swung its clusters in the airs that drew through the alleys of the forest. Here and there were the shanties of Canadian wood-cutters, whom the Shakers had sent to save what fuel they might from the general loss, and whom, at noonday, the pickers came upon as they sat in pairs at their doors, with a can of milk between them, dusky, furtive, and intent as animals. From the first of the strawberries to the last of the blackberries, the birds and chipmunks feasted and only stirred in short flights when the young Shakeresses, shy as themselves, invaded the banquet."

The whole of *The Undiscovered Country* has this openness and sweetness, the ineffable aspect of "free grace." To those who read "dreaming true" a vital novel will say—just as the presence of a friend will say—by all its ways and in its whole outline and gesture something no other creation can tell.

"... toute âme
Donne à quelqu'un

Sa musique, sa flamme,
Ou son parfum."

It is so, that every creative book breathes to the reader dreaming true a special vision of existence. It is so, that each of Mr. Howells's novels says by its presence, something about life which none of its drama alone, nor its scene alone, nor its narrative, nor its characters can tell. It is, I think, the souls in a novel which make its soul. Only art or the living presence may evoke the soul. It is not by speaking of them you know the souls of Mr. Howells's men and women, which are the finest evocations of his art; nor know the soul of each of his novels, but only by reading them.

While each of Mr. Howells's novels sings its own melody, it keeps the time of "the ragged rhythm of life." The incongruous contrasts, the familiar queernesses and illogicality of mortal circumstances—the quality in the fates that makes one almost able to rely upon their being irrational and unexpected in their determination—weave that seizing rhythm through all Mr. Howells's fiction.

After you come home from hearing the exquisite cadences of the low cornices of Parisian avenues, and the engulfing richnesses of Notre Dame, your spirit will be more engulfed, will be searched to its last fastnesses, as you come into New York Harbor, by that same ragged rhythm and close harmony in the architectonics of the New York sky-line. There is no other music like that music of the New York sky-line and of Howells's pages, music telling you the kingdoms of the world are not all main streets, but the cross-streets and the side streets; saying that the days of earth are pulsing here, as fully and as wonderfully as upon her highways, in her cornered byways and the intervals of her great silent places. Maybe this is not what Mr. Howells's music says to other readers. This is what it says to me, at once with the intimacy and originality which is greatness and the truth which is poetry.

Among the ninety-odd titles of Mr. Howell's books, I mention at random, to indicate their range in form, *The Mother and the Father* (dramatic passages), *Stops of Various Quills* (poems), *London Films* (travels), *Vittorio Alfieri* (biography), *Christmas Every Day* (a tale for children), *Through the Eye of the Needle* (sociological satire), *Imaginary Interviews* (collected editorials), *My Year in a Log Cabin* (autobiography) *Parting Friends* (a farce),

Questionable Shapes (tales of the supernatural), *A Previous Engagement* (comedy), *Criticism and Fiction* (literary criticism).

These titles, in narrating in some sort the variety in form of Mr. Howell's work, do not of course even indicate, far less represent, its extensive variety of treatment and material. A mere title cannot tell the simplicity and distinction of the tragedy "Bride Roses," whose touch is like the cool petal of a flower nor the unique funniness and aptness of "The Elevator" and "The Register."

"Besides, you've no principles—and I *have*."

"Oh, I've lots of principles, Nettie, but I've no practice."

Mr. Howells's phrasing, which speaks so fittingly in this instance the tongue of the dialogue of farce, is plastic to any form because it is, as Wordsworth says language should always be, "The incarnation of thought," rather than "The dress of thought."

This very quality of being the incarnation of thought which makes the dialogues of the farces funny gives Mr. Howells's verse and his poems the dignity of being always the sincere expression of a natural mood. Essential as the sincere expression of a natural mood is to the presence of poetry for my own enjoyment, it happens that the rest of Mr. Howells's work has poetry for me in a greater degree than his metrical lines in general. But in particular there are some of them which sing the loveliest poetry of familiarity, the profound preciousness of life, with the quiet, immortal echo of perfect simplicity:

"The first time, when at night I went about
Locking the doors and windows everywhere,
After she died, I seemed to lock her out
In the starred silence and the homeless air,
And leave her waiting in her gentle way
All through the night, till the disconsolate day,
Upon the threshold, while we slept, awake:
Such things the heart can bear and yet not break."

The objection has been made to Mr. Howells's poetry, as to other work of his, that it is sad. Such a criticism, in the character of an object, seems to me inept. For if expression does not recognize sadness, how can it give comfort? I will go further than this and say that I believe that not only is there no comfort for sadness in the expression which implies an ignoring of loss or an ignoring of injustice or of

hardship upon earth, but that the completest mercy of mirth itself remains unknown to him who never ate his bread with tears.

In his editorial writing, too, in social criticism and literary criticism, in biography and autobiography, as in his novels and poems, I am cheered by the fact that Mr. Howells is not of those who consider, like Dickens's people at the picnic, that "whatever is the matter we ought always to dance." I am reassured because he has no alarming, credulous confidence that all that is in American institutions is right; and reassured because his national interest has none of that fatalistic depressing "patriotism" contained in the phrase, "My country, right or wrong," of which Mr. Chesterton remarks that it is as though one should say, "My mother, drunk or sober." This pessimistic species of "patriotism" seems especially undesirable in a critic.

For if the tones of novels, of plays, of poems present, for the reader who reads dreaming true, the inner life, the moods of some changed existence, it would seem to be the function of those other arts in letters which may be loosely called criticism—editorial and biographical writing, travels and reviews—less to assert a devotion to the errors of one's nation than to open a window for the reader upon its ideas and affairs as a part of the ideas and affairs of the whole world.

In this field Mr. Howells has offered to his readers a view of more scope than that displayed by any other of our men of letters I can call to mind. It was he who, as Mr. William Allen White has pointed out, expressed the idea of altruism to America in a day when that principle was chiefly regarded here simply as "a curious theory." It was he who, as Mr. Frank Harris has pointed out, spoke for freedom of belief and against the murder of the Chicago anarchists, in a day when the whole mind of the American public was as closed, as darkened and insane a bedlam on the subject as the mind of Massachusetts once had been upon the subject of the practical necessity of burning witches.

It has been Mr. Howells in a very great degree who has helped America to know, by his acumen and by the generosity and warmth of his appreciation, the power and genius of the great Russians Turgénief and Tolstoi, the drama of Ibsen and Björnsen, the dreaming glamour of Du Maurier, since so widely worshiped and apparently so widely forgotten, the thrilling supernaturalism of Haupt-

mann, the enchanting light on life that falls from the fresh and spiritual tales of the Spanish Valdés and the Italian Verga. His enlightening survey of the ideas of the world reaches not only around us and before us, but back to the true romance and immortal irony of Cervantes and the wisdom of Machiavelli.

Letters is of all others the social art. By social I mean communicative, intended for every one. A marked gift of Mr. Howells, as a critic, is his talent of geniality, that ambassadorial grace of a man of the world, which is also the grace of genuine democracy and makes the reader feel in the presence of a thrilling, new idea, or a distinguished, revelative piece of literature as though this were one's natural sphere.

In his service to the great cause of good reading, reading for the realization of what is before the reader, reading for the free and inspiring reception of new truth, Mr. Howells's career as a critic has been of incalculable value to all American letters. By a psychological process very comprehensible, the sort of fiction-reader who likes to be subconsciously assured that the stage-lion is only Snug the joiner, and that the bloodshed, violence, and oppression he is reading about are not as they are in nature but are all child's play—by a very facile turn of thought this sort of reader is apt, when he sees a real lion brought upon the stage by a truthful journalist or reviewer or publisher, to soothe himself by thinking there is nothing to the lion, and he is artificial; apt to soothe himself about some honest factual account of suffering, of poverty or oppression on our earth, by thinking it must be just an illusory story—without reality. The worst effect of the opiate manner of reading fiction is that it unavoidably begets an opiate manner both of reading and of facing fact. Still more than for the writers and the readers of fiction, Mr. Howells's constant stand for the clear discriminations of the truth is of value for the writers and the readers of facts supporting the whole press, the book, the periodical, the newspaper press—all the readers and writers who are or ought to be concerned with the candid presentation of contemporary history.

The clear discriminations of truth in public expression are especially necessary for our own country where all confusion of verity is certain to become worse confounded from the

circumstance that its people are more heterogeneous, of more various traditions and races and tongues, than those of any other one land.

In his life-long service for the realization of truth, both as a constructive critic and as a creative artist, Mr. Howells has, I think, made for his nation an immortal contribution to the cause of social sympathy and genuine common understanding which is the great end of all letters.

Who can come away from the sincerity of his pages without a sense of the profound poetry of realization, the poetry of knowing life? Who can come away without the belief that nothing else is so vital and so thrilling an adventure as to know one's own life, in one's own place on this actual earth of one's own day and generation?

For whatever our uncertainty, our dream, or faith about the eternities before us and behind us, we have by the proof of our senses this miraculous existence here. In this we know that the greater and deeper achievement of truth bestowed upon us by each generation is all that has helped us to more free enjoyment and fairness, all that has helped us to understand our fellow-mortals more generously and more rightly on our mysterious journey, and to warm and sustain one another more richly from the unknown fire of life kindled in us in the beginning. No names are more honored nor more loved than those which stand for the greater and deeper achievement of truth.

One cannot give thanks exactly for their contribution, for thanks are too little and too personal a thing to give, besides being rather unnatural. One's feeling for the things one cares about is less the sense of thanks than simply one of happiness. It is more with that sense than with any other that one thinks about the beautiful and continuing career of a constant truth-teller, the beloved and honored name of William Dean Howells.

EDITH WYATT.